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ABSTRACT

This first issue of a journal on further education (FE) in the United Kingdom focuses on further education for people with physical disabilities and learning difficulties. The first article is titled "A College with a Mission," by Ernest Theodossin, and looks at the FE programs offered by Lancaster & Morecambe College, the various architectural modifications to allow accessibility for students with physical disabilities, the goals and views of the school principal (who is blind), the special work preparation course aimed at school leavers, and efforts to change employer attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. The second article, "More Than a Career--A Team of Dedicated Professionals" (also by Ernest Theodossin) looks at the individual staff who work with students with disabilities and learning difficulties at Lancaster & Morecambe College. The third article titled "Current Developments for Students with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties in FE" (Colin Booth) notes the replacement of the label "special education needs" with the term "students with learning difficulties or disabilities" in educational legislation and considers implications of educational policies for access to FE and nonsegregation of this population. Additional features include illustrations of computer equipment used by students with disabilities at Lancaster & Morecambe College, vignettes of the experiences of individual students, and a suggested reading list of 15 items. (DB)

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Beyond ramps and rhetoric:

new challenges and issues in learning difficulties

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Innovations

in FE

Innovations in FE

Issue 1 Autumn 1994

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Foreword

Ernest Theodossin
The Staff College

Innovations in FE is a new, regular publication with – one hopes – something different to offer to the further education sector.

The journal's origins lie in a visit to Californian community colleges, which I organised in autumn 1992 when I was returning to the West Coast US scene after six years and leading a small group of British college and TEC managers on a study tour. Our purpose was to learn.

On an earlier visit, in 1986, at the beginning of the British college marketing movement, the Californian colleges I visited appeared like something from another planet. The educational landscape abounded with vigour, novelty and confidence: it all seemed light years away from the British college scene, traditional to the point of being conventional, cautious, discreet, suspicious of most things new. In 1992, in the prospectus for my California study tour, I wrote:

> California – which, were it an independent country, would be the world's seventh largest economy – is generally recognised as having the most advanced education system in the Western world. In terms of innovative developments in both education and other areas of social activity, California is usually the harbinger of things to come elsewhere.

To be fair, novelties abounded on the California scene even in 1992, and I am sure that the group all learnt something and I in particular learnt a considerable amount. Yet compared to 1986 my impression was of an educational sector whose distance from the British scene had narrowed considerably; a subsequent visit in 1993 confirmed that impression. California is not really like anywhere else I have visited, but it no longer seems quite so extraordinarily different.

A part of the explanation is that California itself has changed and is changing. Its community colleges face many problems – social, political and economic. There is a funding crisis in a system that has traditionally been generously resourced. There has been a downturn in the economy. Civil and seismological disturbances have taken their toll. In such areas as financial management, for example, Californian colleges now look positively old-fashioned.

Meanwhile, on the British scene, different changes have been and are occurring. In college marketing, student services, modularisation of the curriculum, building design and adaptation, and quality assurance systems, striking innovations are emerging. What is happening in Britain may owe a great deal to the inspiration derived from the stream of British college staff undertaking American study tours, such as those The Staff College has been running for some years. But the transformation on this side of the Atlantic is not any kind of slavish copying.

" . . . the British FE college of the future already exists."

Genuinely new developments abound. Amidst the furore of new contracts inspectorial grading and a tariff scheme that makes airline timetables appear like light reading, one has to remember that it is an exciting time to be working in the FE sector. One needs, for example, to recall that convergence is about more than the cultivation of league table norms: a new sector is emerging in which for the first time in living memory there is a possibility that sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges may actually be advancing towards something approaching a coherent national system.

Incorporation has already produced dramatic changes on the British FE scene, and one is regularly aware that an enormous amount of new and exciting work is being undertaken, that barriers are being mounted and obstacles overcome. The appointment of senior staff recruited from outside the education service is one explanation. Another is that necessity in the form of financial constraint may be confining but is also sometimes creatively stimulating. What was once the unthinkable is becoming the unexpected; and some of the unexpected has begun to acquire a hint of familiarity.

Whatever else it has and has not done, incorporation has certainly energised the post-compulsory education sector in Britain. Impressive developments are occurring, not everywhere, not consistently and not always even on a large scale – but innovation abounds and continues to grow.

This publication is therefore dedicated to the notions that the British FE college of the future already exists, although not in any one place, and that striking innovations can be found across the British FE sector. One can hardly expect to locate all of these innovations in a single college, but there can be few areas of college activity that have not seen striking developments somewhere. And where one college has led, others have the opportunity of following and of learning by the example and experience of their colleagues.

Moreover, the innovations are not necessarily to be found in the most publicised colleges. There will almost certainly always be FE principals who are 'stars', those larger-than-life individuals who regularly feature in the educational press where they offer instant expertise on the latest issues, who sit on key committees and tread the national lecture platform circuit. There will also most assuredly continue to be showcase colleges where hordes of visitors are marched along a prescribed line to admire what are claimed to be unique (but are often increasingly familiar) achievements. If education is a branch of the communication industry, it is almost inescapable that some people will be better at self-promotion than others.

"A statement was being made unobtrusively but clearly. In short, innovation was present."

This journal deliberately sets out to circumvent the stars and the showcases. Their collective achievements are already widely celebrated. Instead, **Innovations in FE** intends to recognise the remarkable and exceptional in places where they have not always been previously noticed and to focus on exciting developments which might otherwise be overlooked, often because those who are responsible for them are too busy innovating to find time for promotional activity.

The first issue concentrates on people with physical disabilities and learning difficulties, a persistently topical and politically sensitive issue whose prominence derives from the radical social changes that underlie it and are occurring throughout much of the Western world. Lancaster & Morecambe College (L&M) is in most respects a typical FE college, middle-sized, serving a diverse and scattered population, offering a varied programme of courses and activities, some mainstream, others less so, covering a range of quality levels.

L&M is unusual in that it has a blind principal and in its commitment to placing disabled people at the centre of daily life. My links with the college go back to the early 1980s but I had not visited it for nearly a decade when I returned in

1993 to examine what kind of conference and catering facilities it could provide for our regional programme. I was anxious to explore to what extent we could substitute colleges for hotels.

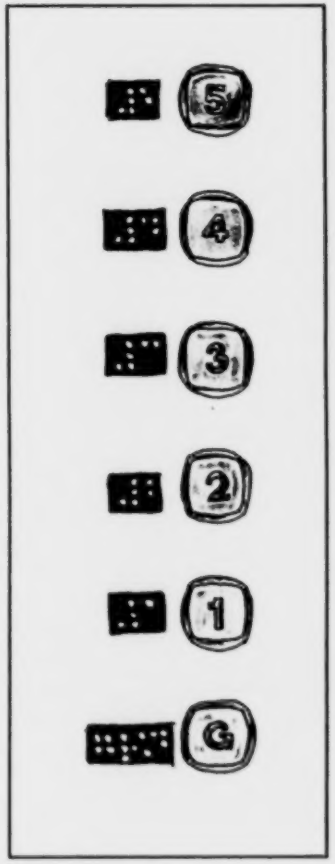
Tracey Lamb, receptionist and switchboard operator, L&M College

I cannot say that I found L&M very suitable for our regional programme needs, largely because its geography means that the conference facilities are embedded in the middle of a large block of teaching rooms, rather than conceived as a separate addition for a distinctive market segment. What did impress me, however, was the presence of people with a variety of disabilities (particularly the receptionist/switchboard operator) located at key points, the extensive system of ramps, the Braille in the lifts – the feeling of being immersed in an organisation at least a part of whose mission was being visibly articulated. A statement was being made unobtrusively but clearly. In short, innovation was present. Others as well may be doing it, or even doing it as well, but that does not detract from the L&M achievement. What has been happening at L&M is exceptional and unfamiliar – at least for the present. Change is afoot in the college. There is conviction and determination. Many people are committed to the transformation. The college of the future is arriving.

One hopes too that this journal itself is innovative. The intention is to devote each issue to a single subject. The presentation is deliberately unscholarly and represents a commitment to journalism rather than research, and is targeted at the generalist rather than the specialist. Colin Booth's article offers a layperson's guide to the field of education for the disabled – the problems and issues, the ideals and debates. There are features on the people who work in and around L&M; the importance and power of the principal are recognised, but so are the contributions and achievements of students and other staff. The visual presentation of each issue is regarded as no less important than the verbal – it is hoped that the visual material will convey something of the spirit and flavour of its subject matter more effectively than words. And because what is offered here is a starting point in education rather than a final statement, the reading list suggests ways in which the interested reader might explore the subject more fully.

Our initial intention is to provide three issues of **Innovations in FE** a year. The next one will concentrate on the dramatic transformation of a conventional college building block with traditional classrooms into a greatly altered learning and working environment. It is hoped that readers who come upon or are involved in innovations will contact us with suggestions for further subjects.

Braille sign in lift at L&M



A college with a mission

Ernest Theodossin

The first, physical impression of Lancaster & Morecambe College is unexceptional. L&M is a medium-sized further education college providing for about 2,500 full-time equivalent students.

One notes buildings which might be described architecturally as Middle to Late County Council in period and style, virtually all of them familiar examples of minimalist functionalism. Every expense has been spared. Little has been constructed to survive the batterings of a large, exuberant and transient population.

The college's physical setting is halfway between the towns of Lancaster and Morecambe, and just off the main road linking both, a perfect example of political compromise. The inhabitants of neither town are less inconvenienced than those of the other. The college has also been built close to an earthquake fault and suffers from occasional tremors, by no means (to date) of the Californian variety, but sufficient for locals to notice. One advantage of the site is that parking is less difficult than at most inner-city colleges.

Once past the main entrance, however, the uniqueness of the place begins to obtrude. There are ramps everywhere. The receptionist and switchboard operator, Tracey Lamb, answers the telephone and receives visitors from her wheelchair. The lift buttons have floor numbers identified both numerically and by Braille tape. And the principal, David Blezard, has been blind since the age of nine and principal of L&M since 1987.

What soon becomes apparent is that L&M is a college where those with disabilities and learning difficulties have been integrated into the routine, everyday life of an educational institution. In this respect at least L&M does begin to resemble the California college scene, where wheelchair occupants dot the landscape and virtually all of the architecture has been designed to accommodate everyone, whatever his or her problems. One thus learns without surprise that David Blezard spent time working in the US in community colleges in the 1960s. He admits that many of his ideas stem from experiences in the States.

It is even less surprising that a blind principal should be sensitive to the disabilities of others and that he should have ensured that his college has, as he puts it, 'invested in people with disabilities.' That investment is expressed in very practical terms:

1. The college has put resources into staff development, i.e. developing 'the attitudes' of staff, raising awareness, promoting understanding.

2. Attempts are continually being made to integrate the disabled into the community, although David admits that, 'We don't always achieve this in the way I want as yet, but we're on our way. We have special needs teachers. The entire curriculum should be open to people with disabilities. Integration requires a learning support structure. That means signers for people with hearing disabilities and tape recorders for examinations. We have spent money, time and effort in developing staff.'

3. Physical arrangements have been transformed. Of the entrances 95 per cent have easily accessible ramps. This has not been possible at the front entrance because of drainage constraints. There are unisex loos for people in wheelchairs. The lifts have buttons at the right height. Signing has been adopted to some extent. Necessary fire doors have

L&M College, with entrance ramps

been installed, although they can be obstructive to wheelchair users. Not everything is ideal, but given the conventional architectural features with which L&M started its collegiate life, it is clear that ingenuity has been used to solve ostensibly difficult problems.

4. The college has purchased equipment designed for people with special needs, much of it undreamed of a decade ago, and some of which 'will be obsolete in another decade'. There are machines to convert Braille to ordinary script, and vice versa. There are also machines which enlarge ordinary script, keyboards designed for people with the use of only one hand, and high-tech equipment which facilitates information technology training for people who might have been denied it a few years ago. Developments in this field are rapid and phenomenal.

5. The college has recognised the need to raise wheelchairs to the required levels or to lower benches. Eating facilities have been modified.

L&M's commitment is also evident in its strategic plan where its identified mission involves targeting people with physical or sensory disabilities and/or with learning difficulties. The college's objectives for the next few years involve building on what has gone before and developing new areas.

David admits that he welcomes, encourages, supports and possibly discriminates in favour of the special work preparation course aimed at school leavers. Vocational education is central to L&M and virtually all students – whatever their difficulties – hope to acquire jobs.

The college aims to receive people from special schools who at L&M can have a first taste of mixing with people who are not disabled or retarded. This necessitates social adjustments, confidence building and the acquisition of skills. The goal is to feed people from the special course into mainstream courses.

The college also tries to treat people as individuals, and some disabled students may go directly into mainstream courses. Others may take some time before they can join a brickwork course, for example. In such an environment the disabled student is not protected, and the brick group can deal out its share of hard knocks.

Despite the idealism and commitment, there remains the struggle of trying to overcome prejudices and preconceptions. David believes that the best exemplar is the individual:

> 'With the macho bricklayer we try to get the message across. Then we depend on the tutor. We

David Blezard, principal of L&M College

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have had one or two difficulties, but overall we have done pretty well. We're fortunate in not having the pressures of the inner city, or restrictions: we have pleasant grounds. That's a character of the area. We have natural advantages. We haven't hit the problems of other colleges over drugs. There is no trooping of security guards. We don't have identity cards.'

Earlier in the week when I visited L&M, a disabled 26-year-old female single parent had started a course. Staff had adjusted equipment to enable her to cope. There is no formal induction of students. Instead the college seeks to develop steadily within its community in order to develop: 'Our social values, our cultural values and our values about the environment.'

'As a student you join us of your own free will. We welcome you. There are no rules beyond two basics.

'If you come here you want something from us. You have to work. If you don't, we reserve the right to kick you out in the end – but we will try to help.

'Secondly, we ask you to observe normal, civilised conduct in the community. We're a microcosm of the country. We have minorities, retired people, single parents. We expect you to be considerate and tolerant. If you're anti-social – teasing and tormenting, the physical side – then we would not tolerate you. That message is put across from teachers, videos, tutorial sessions.'
(David Blezard)

"The changes that are occurring help to take the 'special' out of special needs. We're all special."

David believes that leadership is important and that the style of the institution is set by key people. He is certain that the principal is obviously the most important figure in defining the culture – a judgement that many of us would support – but David also draws attention to the receptionist in the wheelchair, an individual whose impact on the visitor is (as I can testify) immediate, unexpected and encouraging. 'Tracey is a key person,' he points out.

On the topic of leadership, David has clear views:

'I've been here seven years. I selected the senior management team. I eased out some of the old guard. I've looked for people predisposed to similar values. 'We have always had a percentile set aside for areas of work. Partnerships are needed. People need to adjust their thinking to equality. Sometimes the financial side takes over when people are dealing with a principal: they try to get as much money as they can for themselves. I find that disappointing. If you have agreed a philosophy, all should benefit.

'We need help from other agencies, social services, the area health authority, charities, SCOPE (formerly the Spastics Society), the Royal National Institutes for the Blind and Deaf. We rely on chief executives who are business people, people who have a commercial style and know about investment.

'We approach local, national, European agencies. We form partnerships. Two and a half years ago we ran our first pre-work course. We had help from the Action for Blind People charity. We made contacts. We provided staffing, accommodation, know-how. They provided the cash.'

The college prides itself on assisting people with visual impairment and other handicaps. Often such people are unemployed and suffer from the stigma of disability. With visual problems, illness, age or accident (often diabetes) can be the origin:

'We try to offer an individual a programme, counselling and guidance, skills assessment, APL, disability awareness training. We support self-advocacy. We are concerned with how to handle the situation in the office, at interview, in the street. Machines will do for you what you cannot do personally.'

What sustains such work is the hope that individuals will:

1. go into a formal course;
2. gain employment;

3. leave the college more 'together' in body, mind, and understanding of themselves, better able to handle themselves in social and recreational life.

The problems are enormous. Employers (particularly small businesses) are prejudiced. Disability training for employers is vital. Something has to be done for the disabled chef who cannot get work in a hotel. In one instance assistance was provided for buying a freezer van. This involved developing financial skills as a prelude to obtaining a loan from a bank. The chef now prepares food at home where he pre-cooks meals and then serves them at dinner parties and office functions. Such activity cannot turn the individual into a millionaire, but it does assist with providing a reasonable income, as well as a sense of achievement and personal value within the community.

As one would expect from a successful blind man who has reached the top rung of his professional ladder, David is a pragmatist:

> 'The Government has done away with purpose-built rehabilitation centres. It's obviously looking to save money. The rights and wrongs apart, the result is an opportunity for colleges. We moved in.
>
> 'We operate a rehabilitation assessment service for Lancashire and Cumbria, for people who are disabled, bored – the shut-ins (a US term). In special schools (and I'm a product of them) you often find stereotyping, but not with people here.
>
> 'FE is rooted in the community. It's not separate, not a ghetto. The college is open to all community influences. The disabled are integrating into the community. I wouldn't want to go to a special school or college which is not the same as the big wide world.'

Neither, of course, is L&M, but as an educational establishment it is attempting to change the 'big wide world' by both encouraging and activating respect for the individual and for the variety of individual differences.

As David explains:

> 'Four to five years ago the attitude to disabled people was patronising. Now they're not special. The changes that are occurring help to take the "special" out of special needs. We're all special. We need to treat people as individuals.'

More than a career – a team of dedicated professionals

Ernest Theodossin

The stereotype of teachers as idealists disinclined to focus on the practical commercial realities of life has taken something of a battering in the past decade and a half.

Ever increasing pressure to deliver more and more with less and less, exhortations to join the enterprise culture, number fetishism (can one imagine a Further Education Funding Council without numbers?), the three-fold funding system, and pressure for performance-related pay have all taken their toll on the idealism. As we move towards the millennium, lecturers are becoming increasingly (if sometimes reluctantly) business-minded. Today's teachers have to sell and count, and it all has to add up.

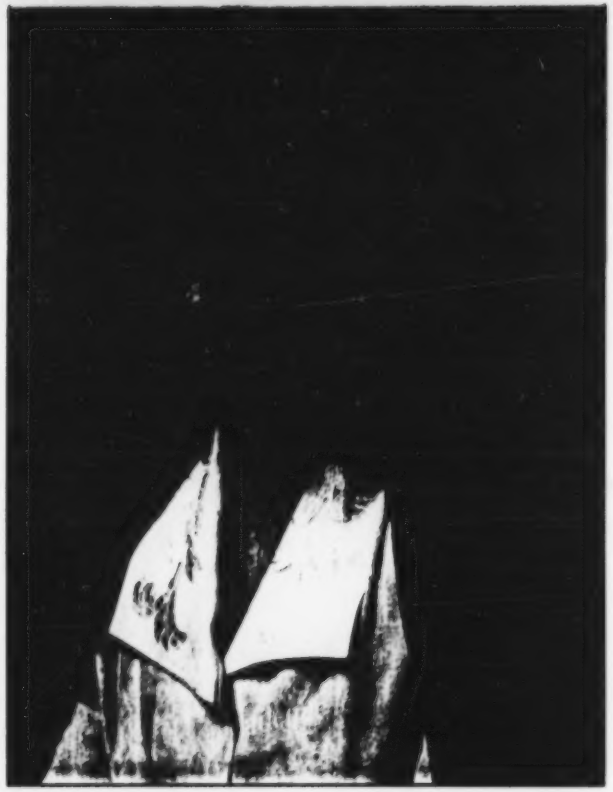
The commercialisation of education has not, however, impacted fully on one area – that of people with physical disabilities and learning difficulties. To be sure, financial considerations are central to the Government's continuing efforts to integrate such people into the larger community. Many colleges would argue that they lack the requisite

resources to serve the needs of potential students who cannot be fitted conveniently into conventional provision, or who are unable to access buildings designed on the assumption that all students can climb any number of stairs to get to and from classes.

Disability is also a highly political issue, as was illustrated by the passions aroused in May 1994 during the row over the civil rights for disabled people bill. That bill, manoeuvred into oblivion by those who were ostensibly supporting it, led to some startling scenes in the House of Commons. The then Minister, Nicholas Scott, faced calls for his resignation not merely from the opposition but from his daughter, who works with disabled people and who was outraged at her father's behaviour. A backbencher, Lady Olga Maitland, was forced to make an 'unreserved apology' (**Guardian**, 26 May 1994) for pretending to have drafted her own blocking amendments. In one of the sharpest personal censures of the past 50 years, she was described by the Speaker as not so much having misled the House as 'exasperated it'.

Even the FEFC, disinclined to involve itself in earmarked funding on the grounds that it does not exist to interfere with college management, has accepted that people with disabilities and learning difficulties are a special case calling for special funding, special care and special considerations. A committee, chaired by Professor John Tomlinson, was set up in September 1993 to collect evidence over a period of three years. A final report is projected to emerge in 1996, with the likelihood of an interim report at an unspecified date.

Whatever else they may be, the FEFC's efforts in this area are clearly not the typical rush job in which government resources are directed at instant conclusions to complex problems, often with previously identified outcomes. On the other hand, the great danger is that provision for disabled people is an area of such emotive force that no government can afford to do nothing about if, even if 'something' means little more than protracted (but inexpensive) consultation serving as a substitute for costly action. One hopes that such is not the case with the FEFC committee, while noting that it will be spending a great deal of time collecting and analysing a lot of data.



What all of this suggests is that if we as a society are to shift from dealing with people with disabilities and learning difficulties in special discrete ghettos towards integrating them into our ordinary institutions and day-to-day public life, then it is not solely a matter of saving money by closing special establishments but of directing those savings (and possibly even more resources) into the receiving organisations. There are thus additional cost implications for both private and public sector providers, implications which doubtless explain the strong feelings that surfaced in the House of Commons debacle. There is, however, much more to disability than financial considerations. Teaching the disabled has many rewards and benefits, even if they are unlikely to be of the financial variety.

It is therefore not altogether surprising to find that those staff who work with students with disabilities and learning difficulties at Lancaster & Morecambe College (L&M) seem so often to exhibit the kind of liberal idealism with which educators were once assumed to be endowed but which has become rather unfashionable since 1979. The impression they make as a group is of professionals who are as committed, enthusiastic and dedicated as they are unexpected in the balance sheet driven world of 1990s education.

Margaret Dodd, who works with students with physical and sensory disabilities, is the kind of enthusiast who illustrates the traditional concept of the teacher as professional. She leads the small unit located off a main ground floor corridor and works closely with students initially facing too many problems to move immediately into mainstream classes. Margaret describes her work as 'helping people to integrate'. That, of course, means not merely classes but jobs, since the greatest difficulty facing people with physical and sensory difficulties is not acquiring workplace skills but actually convincing employers to provide them with work.

A key part of Margaret's task – and the most difficult work she does – involves

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approaching employers for work experience places and jobs. Eight out of 10, she feels, get 'mental picture barriers', often of the 'only steps to the front door' variety. Margaret believes that fear lies at the root of employer rejection of the disabled, fear of 'putting their foot into it', fear of knowing how to talk to disabled people. As she sees it, her task is to try to get employers to look away from the disability and at the ability.

Her background includes working for a local training provider, delivering training for trainers as well as non-occupationally specific skills courses. During her four years general experience, she found herself dealing with people who had disabilities, a new experience which eventually led to her moving into 'special needs'.

She thus shares with many of her colleagues in the same work area the characteristic of having drifted into her present job without ever actually planning it, or as she explains, 'I haven't had a career path.' Work is nevertheless 'very satisfying: I enjoy my job. Nothing in between is possible. I also enjoy working with employers, although the phone has been put down on me before now.' One of her achievements derived from work as part of a team within an association named LISTEN (Local Initiative for Special Needs Training Employer Network), where a group of employers were invited (40 out of 800 invitees came) to a working breakfast. Those who attended were asked to sign up for work experience: everyone agreed. The numbers illustrate the scale of the problem; the achievement has to be put down to determination and conviction.

The work of the unit centres on close, regular involvement with a small number of students, frequently on two courses: Employment Rehabilitation, and Training for Work. Over a year, Margaret works with something like 35 to 45 people, aged 18 to 60. Some were born with disabilities; others have been disabled at work. All of them are unique, with individual problems not quite like anyone else's. What they all lack, and what Margaret and her colleagues have to develop together with them, is confidence. Success is therefore about sending them into the wider world, a mainstream course or a job. Sometimes the departure is partial and students leave the haven of the unit for only limited periods, having their computers or other equipment moved in and out of the surrounding college.

In her small unit a mixture of informality and dedication reigns. There is fondness and affection, as well as evident respect from the students for Margaret and her colleagues, but there is also an underlying recognition that work has to be addressed squarely if transformations are to occur. In turn this means that frustrations have to be eased, discouragement has to be lightened: there is considerable humour amidst the commitment.

Many of the photographs which accompany these articles about L&M had to be taken twice, once by an amateur cameramen whose lighting did not provide work of publication standard, and later by a professional photographer. The latter involved meticulous attention to setting up lighting and reflectors, polaroid trial shots, moving of furniture, etc. – all of the elaborate equipment and rituals intended to ensure that what emerges is well lit and effectively captured. Margaret was certainly surprised at the time taken and not altogether pleased with the disruption to her students' work. There is seldom any doubt about where Margaret's loyalties lie.

Elaine Richardson has had a varied career in secretarial work and nursing. The latter involved the problem of requiring attendance from 1pm to 11pm, an obvious inconvenience when raising a family. For a time she worked at Beaumont College, Lancaster, and was in nursing in Preston but found the travelling difficult. Now she assists at L&M, working with Margaret Dodd.

Elaine's present job has the advantage of daytime working hours but the disadvantage of proceeding – as so many of these jobs do – by temporary contracts. At the time I met her she had

less than six months to go. She supports students in the classroom, helps with typing (she has word processor skills) and what she calls 'chatting', although she has no counselling qualification. At L&M Elaine has had staff development support. She has done a sign language course and, when we talked, was waiting to hear whether she would be supported for a Braille course.

She has not personally encountered resentment from colleagues over generous staffing levels in learning support, but recognises this could occur. Nonetheless, one cannot have the same student:staff ratio throughout the college; she points out that mainstream work is different, and not many people are employed in learning support.

Peter Collins

As an outsider visiting the college, one cannot help but reflect on the substantial resources, physical and human, that are directed towards the training of a small number of students with physical disabilities. One-to-one teacher-student contact is vital. The resultant costs can never be negligible.

Do teachers dealing with increasingly larger classes in the face of decreasing funding ever resent the special treatment meted out to disabled students? Margaret Dodd thinks not. 'Staff do not resent the resource put into this area. At least I haven't met with resentment yet. I've been here since June 1992. Anyway, I get people into mainstream courses.'

Robin Butterfield also works in the same area and has been at L&M for 10 years, part-time and full-time. He is less certain about the attitudes of mainstream staff. 'I don't know. Any feelings towards the small numbers would be offset by the involvement with disabled students. Not all teachers would want to do it anyway.

'Attitudes have changed, but I'm uncertain they're all to the good. It could be seen as a diversion of funding. People don't know that there is special funding, although the information is available if staff want to find out.

Lindsey Walker

Robin's commitment to students with disabilities has been present throughout his teaching career, which began as a part-time member of staff at Accrington and Rossendale College. Nowadays he 'can't notice disablement on a day-to-day basis'. He does the work because he enjoys helping people. He feels there are some who could not cope with disabled people, but at L&M staff have a choice: 'I've always been asked.'

Students with learning difficulties are also provided for at L&M, although the work is less specialised and, given L&M's non-segregation policy, less isolated. Those who work in this field are a mixture of traditional FE teachers who, like many before and since, have had to accommodate the wide ability range that characterises FE clientèle. They are thus seldom specialists and have not necessarily had any special training. In many instances they are assisted by (usually) part-time female staff who often work on a one-to-one basis in supporting students with particular learning difficulties. Some of these women have been professionally trained for their specialist roles.

Peter Collins spends over half his time teaching and the remainder on internal verification for NVQ programmes. He monitors student progress through interviewing and helps them to develop action plans. Like so many others, Peter's current interests have emerged through his job as a result of the lack of segregation among students at L&M. He finds no specific problems in working with students with learning difficulties.

Peter is helped by **Lindsey Walker** who works in the catering department and in community services. She supports students in the mainstream environment and joins academic colleagues in regular Monday meetings. Lindsey and Peter agree that staff work well as a team and that students accept the group. Lindsey has a background in special needs work but did a mainstream teaching certificate. Her current professional interests have thus emerged through choice. Although she works only eight hours per week, she is aware that there is more work that

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Sylvia Liver

could be done and would be interested in a full-time job should one arise.

Robert Glenn is a course tutor for students in catering, a field in which disabled students seldom figure in full-time mainstream work because, as he explains, 'It could be dangerous. We have no one in a wheelchair and no one with a severe disability. Three years ago we did have a guy who had problems with his hand. He couldn't chop as fast as the others, so we gave him extra time.'

In his seven years at the college, following 16 years in the industry, Robert has always worked with special needs students. 'Catering attracts people with learning difficulties.' He is in fact a mainstream lecturer in a college in which special needs students are integrated into ordinary courses wherever possible. He has had no special training for the specialist work, although others have attended courses. If he has problems he can go to colleagues for assistance.

Sylvia Liver is a care assistant who works for 24 hours a week, one of three people employed under the same conditions. Until the previous summer there were four full-time posts, but then two people left. Staffing in this area depends on fluctuating levels of resourcing.

Sylvia's duties take her across departments and involve students with a variety of problems. Some have mental health difficulties. Some have problems with communication. They come to her in different groups and she sees them on a regular, timetabled basis. 'The groups', she explains, 'like continuity.'

Sylvia has always done caring work, first with the elderly and then with youngsters. She has 'been on courses and done qualifications.' She has a staff development programme and has completed a sign language course.

She herself has not come across any resentment from colleagues in mainstream work, but has 'heard of it'. She is convinced that L&M is not a typical college and that other colleges are not as well provided for in her area.

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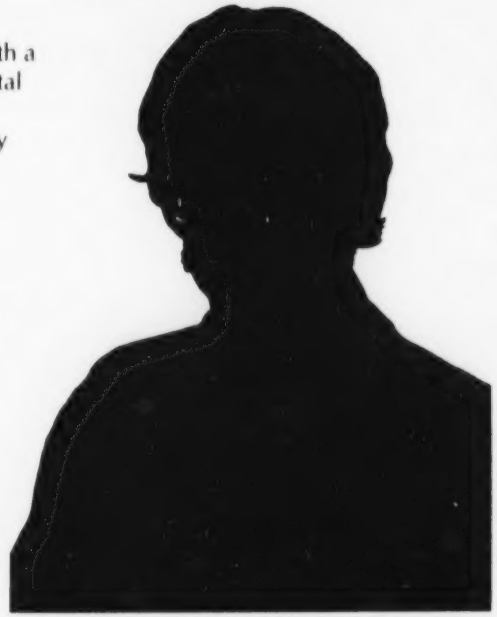
Other kinds of staff make possible the specialist work in L&M.

Sue Chapman is the learning support co-ordinator. When I saw her she had spent the previous two weeks finding out about new students and trying to identify their special needs. Collectively they represent over 100 FTE students.

Sue started her present work in schools through involvement 'with kids who don't fit in.' Most of her special needs teaching was done in Sheffield. She expects to stay in the field. Inevitably, Sue's work is what she calls 'resource led'. LAWTEC (Lancashire Area West Training and Enterprise Council) and Action for Blind People courses get subsidy, but not BTEC or C&G courses. Work in this field is therefore reliant on the FEFC, and it is not only resources for courses that are required. Dyslexic students ideally need word processors at home, and when they cannot afford the purchase, the college needs to step in. Finding the cash is a perpetual problem.



Martin Butler

In terms of background **Martin Butler** is probably the proverbial 'odd man out', or so it might appear. Several of his colleagues took me aside to inform me that he had a PhD and still continued to do work with special needs children. The feeling of surprise that anyone with the intellectual capacity to undertake postgraduate work should, as a consequence, be less interested in working with students with learning difficulties is in itself a comment on lingering, outdated social attitudes. If doctors of the medical sort work with people who have physical problems, why should doctors of the philosophical sort not do the same with students who have academic problems?

Martin in fact became interested in the area while he was doing his PGCE, has done similar work at South Thames and Hackney, and intends to continue with what he is doing for the foreseeable future.

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Martin is responsible for the work preparation course in special needs and deals with people with moderate learning difficulties. To some extent he tries to get students to infill but that is not always easy. At one time he had 30 students on the course but the ability spread was too wide. Now Martin tends to work with smaller groups where he is able to provide more individualised assistance.

On the matter of possible colleague resentment, Martin is convinced that other lecturers do not disapprove of special resources being directed towards the students he works with. Such people need more assistance and, 'We're not seen as having favourable conditions. Our students are difficult to work with. Work experience is difficult. There are no large employers in this area. Making contacts takes a lot of time. We have to beg and plead and creep a bit. I try not to give a false idea of our students. If I'm stuck for a place, I go to the Yellow Pages.'

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Front line staff, of course, are where the action is – on-stage and in the spotlight. They are responsible for making things happen or not happen, but they are supported at L&M by a substantial amount of off-stage activity.

Mohammad R Anwar, the college finance manager, has been in post for more than three years. Prior to that he spent three years at Nelson and Colne College. Anwar does not see the cost of L&M provision for people with disabilities as a problem.

Much of the college's work in this area is subsidised from outside, for example, through projects supported by the TEC and by Action for Blind People. The figures are not rooms costed, but then the course they offer for 15 to 20 people is not output-related either (although some other courses are). If only five people turn up, Action for Blind People still pays. At times there are low numbers. In any event, of the college's 100,000 course hours only about 1,500 are devoted to work in this area.

The Braille in the lifts and the many ramps that L&M possesses were all paid for by the college. Some of the Hunter money (allocated to colleges for rectifying building deficiencies) will be used to provide more disabled access.

Anwar also points out that employing disabled people can have not only social but also straightforward financial advantages. Both the receptionist/switchboard operator and a technician who became disabled while on the job are full-time members of staff who have part of their salaries paid for by outside schemes, 45 per cent in the first instance and 50 per cent in the second.

Jon Piggott, head of the faculty of general and community education, is a senior manager with a wide range of responsibilities. Inevitably his work with people with learning disabilities has to be undertaken within the larger context of his faculty, an area of the college that has something like 1,000 full-time equivalent students of whom only about 20 to 30 are likely to be found in the special unit at any one time. The amount of time Jon can devote to special needs work obviously varies from week to week and depends on a variety of other pressures.

Jon believes that in order for work in this area to proceed it requires one or two dynamic people, often individuals who share the problems that are being addressed. At L&M, for example, there are several disabled members of staff, and Jon himself has a son with learning difficulties. At various times there have been other outsiders who have been instrumental in developments in this area. One man who went blind and took a visual disability course at L&M later worked for Action for Blind People and helped

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with equipment and advice on how to get more from other people. It also helps, he feels, to involve students in the day-to-day running of the college, and disabled students sit on the safety committee and the development committee.

Cheryl Woodman works for Action for Blind People, and as such she is an outsider whose role is to facilitate and support L&M work. Her job centres on finding sources of funding and her goal is to get blind people into employment. Inevitably her work brings her into contact with training and enterprise councils, one of which she worked for prior to her present post. Now that she is 'on the other side', as it were, knowing what TECs are about and how they work has proved helpful.

Cheryl corroborates the view that larger employers are more enlightened about people with disabilities. 'They have a positive attitude. With smaller companies it's otherwise. They often reject people for stereotypical reasons. Work experience helps to change people's ideas.' Part of the role of Action for Blind People also involves lobbying.

In terms of the scale of the problem, Cheryl guesses that the number of blind people in the Lancaster and Morecambe area must be in the hundreds. In Merseyside (Liverpool, Birkenhead) a research project revealed that there were 24,000 blind and visually impaired people, although not all of them were registered and not all of them were of working age.

Action for Blind People is involved in funding work at L&M and Cheryl thinks that the college is particularly effective in what it does. According to Cheryl, 'They have a good record. Part of the TEC funding is based on outcomes. At L&M the projected targets have even been exceeded.'

Her judgement is based on experience which involves other colleges as well. The attitude at L&M is in line with her own aims. 'If there is a criticism about other colleges, it is that they're almost too caring. They almost never let them go. People go from course to course. They can become eternal students. That's not what we're about. Here they get them into work,' an attainment which effectively sums up the aspirations and achievements of L&M's work with people with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Current developments for students with disabilities and learning difficulties in FE

Colin Booth
South Thames College;
with contributions from art students at South Thames College

A recent article on the front page of the **Times Educational Supplement** (14 Jan 1994) painted a very depressing picture of the opportunities available to students with learning disabilities in colleges of FE. Segregation, negative labelling, under-resourcing, empty rhetoric and poor management structures are, it seems, all too common. The article was referring to a report on a survey of students with learning disabilities due to be published in December 1994.

Access to local further education for students with physical disabilities is often worse than for students with learning disabilities. Few colleges have easy physical access or are able to provide specialist support for students with physical disabilities or sensory impairments.

There are, however, examples of excellent practice in colleges and the Further Education Funding Council seems determined to build on these in carrying out its duty to secure a service that meets the needs and aspirations of students with disabilities.

What happened to special needs?

The **Further and Higher Education Act 1992** does not mention students with special educational needs. These needs were first legally defined in the **Education Act 1981** as 'learning difficulties significantly greater than those of the majority of the same age'. According to the 1981 Act, pupils had a learning difficulty if they had a disability that prevented them from making use of facilities, or they had significantly greater difficulty in learning than their peers.

The label 'special educational needs' therefore included: people with learning disabilities (including dyslexia), people with sensory or physical impairments, people with emotional or behavioural difficulties and those who needed special provision because they were significantly more able than their peers.

Although the FHE Act 1992 does not use the label 'special educational needs' (SEN), the description 'students with learning difficulties or disabilities' replaces SEN. The label has changed but the legal meaning remains the same.

In both the 1981 and 1992 Acts a person has a learning difficulty if:

> a) he has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of persons of his age, or
>
> b) he has a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided by institutions within the further education sector for persons of his age. (**FHE Act 1992.** Section 4 [6])

The Employment Department and training and enterprise councils still use the term 'special needs' to refer to a much wider range of people with 'learner support' o. 'learning support' needs. Employment Department-funded courses in colleges (e.g. Youth Training) have always worked with a different definition of special needs from LEA funded courses.

Why the change?

Special needs had become a label rather than the description of someone who needed additional support which it had set out to be. Certainly, in FE, 'special needs' had largely become a label given to groups of students with moderate or severe learning difficulties.

Being labelled a 'special needs student' (as students often were) was disabling in itself. The label often raised anxiety in, and changed the attitudes of, lecturers teaching students with similar difficulties or impairments who had not been labelled in this way.

Some special needs sections in colleges have already changed their names to reflect the new legislation and a change in the kind of service they provide. There is a general movement away from special needs sections and a special needs curriculum towards a system of learning support.

Just in time to avoid confusion (possibly?) the Further Education Unit (FEU) has put forward some useful definitions of 'learner support' and 'learning support'.

> *Learner support* describes the facilities needed by individuals for full participation in programmes or courses of study and to help them acquire the status of a learner, for example: childcare facilities, information on financial support or personal counselling.
>
> *Learning support* defines the additional support that would enable students to learn more effectively and to progress and

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Lisa Remzi

My name is Lisa Remzi. I am 26 and I have got cerebral palsy. Before joining the art course I spent most of my time at a day centre. I didn't like being there because I felt that I was too young to be in one; I wanted to do something a bit more meaningful with my life. I would like eventually to go on to design textiles.

I was a bit worried about coming on this course because of my speech impairment – I worried about being understood. I have found it a committed but fun place to be. I have someone to help me with my everyday things. The college allows me to meet and work with able-bodied students. It is continuing with steps to make it accessible to all.

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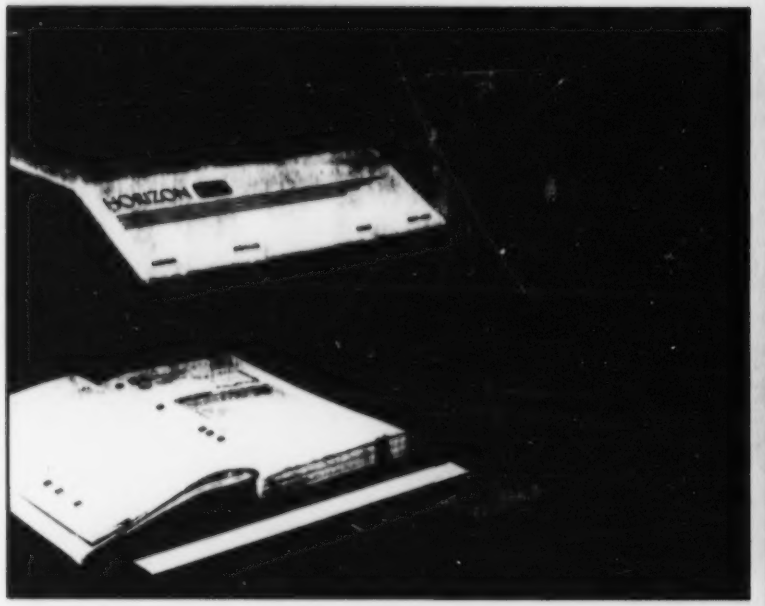
Empowerment through technology – helping students to independence

The photos on these two pages show some of the computer equipment in use at L&M College

Computer with one-handed keyboard

Large screen monitor (20 inch) with a one-handed keyboard attached, for those unable to use a standard 'qwerty' version. The keyboard in the photo is a left-handed one; L&M also have a right-handed version.



Closed-circuit television (CCTV)

CCTV magnifies text to various sizes, to allow any written materials to be accessed by students with partial or limited sight. The CCTV can magnify both colour and black and white.

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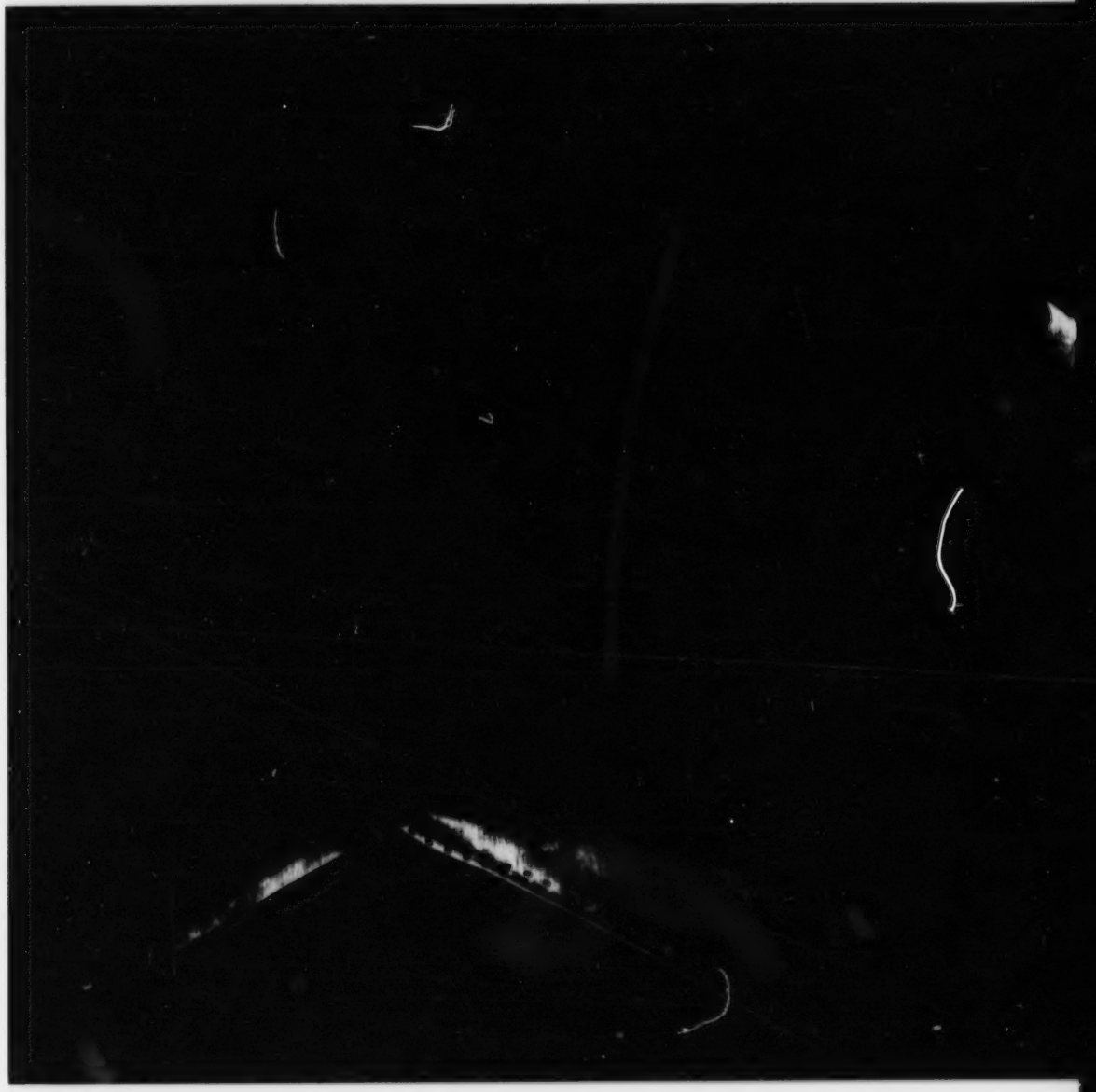
Large screen monitor·with printer

Another view of the 20 inch monitor, which allows text to be magnified so that students with partial sight can access the software and information technology training. This photo shows the magnified text on the screen and the size of the print when output to a printer.



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continued from p15

> achieve. In some cases this might be direct support such as a note-taker, signing support, assistance with personal care needs or provision of Braille material. In other instances, teaching strategies may need to be modified or materials adapted (**Supporting learning.** FEU 1993).

The FEFC often refers to students with additional or 'learning support needs' in the context of what they are prepared to fund additionally. It seems that, as well as students with disabilities and learning difficulties (as defined by the FHE Act 1992), the Council is prepared to fund additional support for ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) students and for 'additional tutoring in numeracy, literacy or English, for students pursuing a primary learning goal which is not itself a qualification in basic literacy' (FEFC **Circular 93/32**).

The Funding Council is, therefore, recognising the learning support needs (in terms of additional units of activity) of a slightly larger group of people in the FE system than those who have (or might have had) SEN statements* in the school system.

* Around two per cent of the school population have statements of their special educational needs. It was recognised in the **Warnock Report** (1978) and the **Education Act 1981** that around 20 per cent of pupils would need additional help at some stage in their school careers. However, particular attention was paid to the smaller two per cent who needed the protection of a statement. A statement is a written document compiled by an educational psychologist with inputs from other specialists. A local authority is legally required to provide the support described in a pupil's statement. Parents, teachers or other professionals are able to initiate the statementing process if they feel it is necessary. Due to a loophole in the 1981 Act the statementing procedure was never implemented in most FE colleges although LEAs were legally required to maintain statements for pupils in sixth form colleges.

Language, policy and models of disability

People with disabilities tend not to like the labels 'special needs' or 'handicapped'. The language we use to frame policy, and the policy itself, needs to empower people.

> We don't have special needs, we have ordinary needs – those for a decent education ... It is the system that makes us special, it is the system that marginalises us and that is what we are against. (Steve Clamp, Convenor of the NUS Students with Disabilities Campaign, talking on Radio 4, *'Does he take sugar?'*, 1990)

Decisions are often made by professionals on behalf of people with disabilities within a framework of legislation and provision that is based on sympathy rather than rights and entitlement. The attitude of our current legislators was demonstrated in May this year when the civil rights bill was deliberately blocked and talked out of Parliament.

The **Charter for further education** (DfE 1993) requires colleges to develop their own detailed charters by summer 1994. In these, colleges are required to provide information about their policies and arrangements for students with disabilities and learning difficulties. This *could* be an opportunity for colleges to take into account the views of people with disabilities.

In **Disability equality in the classroom: a human rights issue** (ILEA 1990), Michelline Mason and Richard Rieser describe two models of disability: the medical model and the social model. In a publication which provides an excellent insight into the tension that exists between these disparate views, they provide us with a vocabulary that informs debate in the new FE.

Within a medical model of disability the focus of attention is on the physical impairment, which is seen as the cause of the disability. Professionals (often the medical profession, hence 'medical model') try to alleviate the impairment. People become objects and are referred to in terms of a diagnosis (for example, 'she is an epileptic'). Those who assess (professionals) define rights to assistance and exercise control over the individuals in most areas of their lives.

In contrast, a social model of disability recognises that, given the resources and commitment, physical or mental impairments need not prevent people from being able to live valued lives. It is society's unwillingness to accept the impairments, to deploy resources and to alter itself that causes the disability. The problem is firmly outside the individual and becomes society's collective responsibility.

"Valued people are virtually never marginalised or segregated from society against their will. One will see such segregation only where people are devalued."

The social model of disability is being advocated by people with disabilities themselves as a realistic basis on which to structure policy and provision.

Access to FE

What are the main barriers for students with disabilities or learning difficulties?

Of course, it depends on how we look at the problem. Is a barrier something that we help people to adapt to and overcome, or should we attack the barrier itself? In short, should we concentrate on giving students additional support to access courses or should we re-structure courses to make them more accessible?

It is easy to concentrate on physical problems but what are the main barriers for students with disabilities?

College ethos and methods of course delivery

Are students with disabilities valued or are they seen as a problem? If part of a college's ethos focuses on being student-centred then many of the potential barriers for students with physical or learning disabilities may not exist.

For provision to be student-centred, in addition to understanding the subject matter, lecturers should:

- be aware of the requirements/aims of each student;
- understand the learning patterns of each student;
- be able to provide appropriate resources to enable learning to take place for each student.

To do this, lecturers may need advice and support when dealing with students with disabilities or learning difficulties.

Within a student-centred college students should be guided towards a choice of course that suits their own interests and abilities and should be able to set their own aims and criteria for success.

Course structure

Lack of flexibility in course structure and delivery causes problems for students with either physical or learning disabilities. Modular courses and competence-based assessment are developments across the FE system which could make colleges more accessible to students with disabilities.

The expansion of open and flexible learning centres should have created opportunities for people with disabilities to access FE. Sadly, although the course structures are often ideal, lack of attention to the other access needs has meant that one or two centres (e.g. Coventry Technical College, North Devon College, Oldham College Access Centre) have successfully attracted students whilst most centres remain inaccessible to students with disabilities.

> In general, access for disabled students to open learning centres was not good. To some extent this mirrors the difficulty of access for students with disabilities to much education and training but more should have been done to take account of the needs of this important group.
> (**Open learning centres in England and Wales 1988–92.** ALBSU Report 1993)

Transport

No matter how good the support in college is, many students will simply not be able to get there. Transport to and from college for 16–19 year olds with a disability remains the responsibility of the local education authority. Even if LEAs continue to provide a good service, it still leaves many people without transport. Mobility allowances are inadequate for normal travel needs without the cost of daily travel to and from college.

Social services departments have a duty under section 2(1)(c) of the **Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970** to assist disabled people to access educational facilities. This could include transport. However, in practice, social services are as short of resources as the education system. In the end, those individuals who, for one reason or

Being deaf I communicate using BSL (British Sign Language). Over the last two years I have had support from signers/ interpreters. More people in the college are beginning to sign now. Although the people in my group cannot sign, they are very friendly and help me when they can. I have always enjoyed drawing and hope, after college, to work in this area.

Dwayne Campbell

another, can use their own or public transport will probably have far greater access to FE than others.

Any college that can provide transport should find a dramatic increase in demand from people with disabilities.

Threshold services

Few enquiry and interview systems in colleges are geared up to deal properly with students with disabilities. In most colleges the process from enquiry to placement on a suitable course is considerably more difficult for a student with a disability.

Small problems

Students with mobility impairments in particular often need small or specific adaptations for their needs. Although the equipment may be cheap or the adaptation very small it requires someone with sufficient time to discover exactly what the problem is and ensure that something is done – it's not the cost of the solution that is expensive, it's having people with the time to sort out the problems.

Major physical access problems (ramps, lifts, etc.)

Few FE college sites in this country are fully accessible to people with disabilities. In many cases relatively small investments could dramatically improve this situation. However, it rarely seems to be a priority.

Physical support

Many students with learning disabilities need teacher or classroom assistant support to succeed in mainstream classes. Students with physical disabilities may need help in class or at break times. Again, social services departments can help with this by exercising their duty under the **Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act**.

It is sometimes difficult to see why social services departments, health authorities and colleges (or up to now LEAs) have been so determined not to work together in making provision for students with disabilities. There must be efficiency savings in assisting some people to access their local college rather than continuing with day centre or other provision.

Non-segregation

Valued people are virtually never marginalised or segregated from society against their will. One will see such segregation only where people are devalued. Almost every educational report and piece of legislation dealing with people with disabilities has recognised the need for less segregation.

The **Education Act 1944**, which made it a duty for LEAs to find out who needed special provision, recognised the need to keep pupils in mainstream education. The **Warnock Report** in 1978 gave us three types of integration: social, locational (not in an annexe or huts), and functional (in the same lessons). The 1981 Act said, 'pupils should be in mainstream education except where it is not economic'. However, the proportion of the school population in special schools has not substantially changed over the past 15 years.

Reports and legislation have produced very slow progress towards integration in FE. The funding mechanism set by

Zarina Suti

I am a full-time student at South Thames College and I am presently working towards a BTEC Art & Design 1st Diploma course.

I have to admit that at first I had my doubts as to whether I would like this or not. Not only am I disabled with a wheelchair but I was apprehensive as to how I would integrate with the other students, a lot of whom are from another generation. All of these worries were unfounded. Having just completed one term I have to say that I have relished every minute of it.

My age and disabilities have not made the slightest difference to my classmates or for that matter to me – we all work together as one. The only difference with my situation is that the college arranges specialised transport for my journeys to and from the college and there are always sympathetic staff to help with lifts or carrying equipment or any other obstacle that can present itself to somebody using a wheelchair.

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the FEFC looks set to quicken the pace. What is more, this seems to be a definite policy commitment by the Council rather than a series of decisions based on pragmatism or economics.

Recent history

Powerful lobbying ensured that students with disabilities and learning difficulties were provided for in the FHE Act 1992. In his initial letter of guidance, the Secretary of State for Education specifically required the new Further Education Funding Council to take into account the needs of such students (see quotation from Bill Stubbs' speech at the first John Baillie Memorial Conference).

The FEFC surveyed colleges and LEAs in 1992 to find the volume of provision currently being made. They found that 100,000 students who were considered to have a learning difficulty or a disability were attending FE colleges and, in addition, 1,700 students were placed at independent institutions.

In order to discharge their duties effectively, the Council decided they needed expert advice. Merillee Huxley was seconded from the schools inspectorate to the FEFC in 1992 to advise on policy for students with disabilities and learning difficulties. The results of most of those initial policy decisions have yet to be felt in colleges. However, the autumn term 1994 may see the start of many changes in colleges across the country. Merillee has now joined the FEFC inspectorate.

It is clear that the Funding Council is concerned about the lack of up-to-date information available on students with disabilities in further education. The last full national report into the education service provided for young people with 'special educational needs' was the **Warnock Report** in 1978.

Therefore, on 3 December 1992, the Funding Council decided to establish a specialist committee with a brief to provide an up-to-date national overview and to provide advice to colleges and to the Council on how best it can fulfil its responsibilities under the Act.

The Tomlinson Committee started work in September 1993 and is due to report in 1996. At its first meeting it decided it would investigate and consider the following:

- definitions of students with learning difficulties;
- assessment of student needs, outcomes, and use of resources;
- college planning and management;
- the development and application of the Council's funding methodology;

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"The Secretary of State devoted much of his initial letter of guidance to students with learning difficulties and disabilities. This stated that the FEFC should:

- aim to ensure that, as far as is consistent with its duties under sections 2 and 3, learning difficulties are no bar to access to further education;
- ensure that statemented students at sixth form colleges enjoy continuity of provision;
- obtain specialist advice where this is not available from its own resources;
- ensure that adequate arrangements exist for assessing the needs of students with learning difficulties and disabilities;
- take into account the role of other agencies involved in the provision of advice and support to students, and encourage inter-agency collaboration;
- consider how to secure the support services required to meet needs in the new sector;
- when allocating funds to colleges, take account of the additional costs of making provision, including any additional support that may be appropriate to enable the students to have access to the curriculum.

These specific references come within the broader policy context established in the letter of guidance – expansion of provision; an emphasis on college responsiveness and cost-effectiveness and an emphasis on the quality of students' experience."

(Bill Stubbs, Chief Executive of the FEFC, talking in December 1992 at the first John Baillie Memorial Conference)

The student experience at L&M College

Ifeolu Akintunde is a blind student who comes from Nigeria. Ife (as he is known to colleagues) was at Lancaster University when he learned about the facilities at L&M, where he has since been able to develop skills through working on a variety of specialist equipment. He has been impressed by the flexibility of L&M provision: 'People are prepared to liaise with you. Someone like me needs to know about social security, job centres, TECs. Help is available here. The aim is to get people into courses in the college. Staff come here regularly. The influence of this room on the college is enormous.'

Ife Akintunde

Kristian Johnson is a second year catering student. Kristian, who had learning difficulties while at a local secondary school, found out about L&M through a careers open day. At the college he is assisted by Lindsey Walker and is hoping the college can lend him a computer with a spell checker. He feels that the atmosphere at L&M is especially welcoming. 'I like college better than school. People talk to you here. It's like a big family on the catering course.'

Pauline Holme is in her second year at L&M. Last year she did maths and English, home technology and cookery science. She also had an opportunity to work in an old people's home for six weeks. She enjoys L&M as much as she did school.

Mark Cross

Mark Cross is a third year catering student with numeracy and literacy problems. Mark came to L&M through the experience of a day release link course run with a special school where he was a pupil. At L&M Mark has been helped by Lindsey Walker. His immediate goals include working on a ship once he has completed his college course.

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Thomas Knowles has just begun at L&M on a work preparation course. He learnt about the college while at school but actually entered his course through help from a Lancaster careers officer.

David Evans has experienced sight and hearing problems from birth. He attended a special school in Preston and worked for nine years in industry before coming to L&M. David was getting 'fed up' with the job and coming to feel that it was unsafe for him, as well as providing little scope for moving on. There was certainly no possibility of relocating. A change of management led to his departure.

David is extremely interested in technological developments and keen on specialist equipment. The CCTV magnifies books and enables him to read, as does the large computer screen. At L&M he finds the atmosphere 'better than I expected. There are little things that help, like enlarging the material on the business and administration exercises so I can see it. I was able to make a good start at the college while it was quiet in the summer. I haven't actually met the principal, but he might be the reason why the college is better in providing services for the blind and visually impaired.'

David Evans

Gillian Dowker

Gillian Dowker came to L&M after becoming disabled while at work. A local disability officer suggested the college, where she was put on a rehabilitation potential course. She has since been studying business administration and is doing computing. Difficulties with her back have been assisted by the availability of an ergonomic chair supplied by the TEC. Her course fee has been paid by Action for Blind People. She notes that, 'The principal has been very encouraging. I thought I was at a dead end. I have gained confidence through being here.' Gillian's chair is moved to mainstream classrooms to enable her to attend twice a week.

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continued from p21

- the role of specialist colleges outside the FEFC funded sector;
- funding, organisation and delivery of services;
- collaboration between different agencies;
- the quality of provision.

A recent survey into the experiences of students with learning disabilities taken over a five year period in the North of England is critical, claiming that, in many cases, course and college organisation leads to negative labelling and segregation of students, with a consequent devaluing and lack of opportunity (**TES** 14 Jan 1994). The survey also suggests that practice falls short of many claims of increasing integration of students with learning disabilities. Many students were found to be in separate units or on discrete courses receiving a second class, under-resourced and segregated service. Good practice, where it was found, tended to be the result of the commitment of individual members of staff. (The full report of the survey is due to be published in December this year.)

At present, access to quality service in colleges of further education seems to differ from non-existent to excellent depending on the nature of individuals' disabilities and where they live.

" . . . in many cases, course and college organisation leads to negative labelling and segregation of students, with a consequent devaluing and lack of opportunity."

It is, perhaps, a rather depressing picture. However, I am at least a little optimistic about the future.

The Funding Council seems determined that resources will follow individual students and that the level of resourcing will relate to the need and levels of support provided. This can serve only to improve the way in which learning support is managed in colleges.

Current developments

The Funding Council has set a system where additional funding follows individual students and is based on individual need. This is very different from the circumstances that most colleges have recently experienced. Local authorities gave a weighting factor for students with special needs in their schemes of delegation: resources were not related to actual support or activity, but were based on whether a student had an SEN label or not. Rarely were colleges required to specify what the need was or what they were going to provide. Under the FEFC's rules, colleges will now have to say why the student needs additional support and exactly what support the college is going to provide.

> Institutions will need to provide audit evidence of additional support provided.
> (FEFC **Circular 93/39**)

The banding system intended by the Council is a more delicate instrument than the crude weighting factors used by LEAs.

It is based on specific identified need and should, therefore, result in more accurate targeting of resources. Also, the funding system assumes that students *can* be integrated.

Creating access to mainstream qualifications will, of course, cause many colleges with existing special needs sections a great number of problems. Supporting access to courses for students with learning difficulties is a very different job from delivering a discrete course. Much restructuring and staff development may have to take place.

Planning for 1994/95

I talked to Merillee Huxley (Senior Inspector with the FEFC) in January this year with the aim of gaining more insight into some of the recent circulars issued by the Council – particularly those on inspections and funding. The following is my summary of the essential points of our discussion under broad questions.

CB Is it FEFC policy to increase the integration of students with disabilities in colleges using the funding mechanism?

MH There is good and poor quality integrated and discrete provision. The most important thing is that the curriculum content and method of delivery are designed to meet the needs of the students and the aims of the course. The real question one must ask is whether learning is taking place or not and whether it is the learning that was intended.

CB What are the characteristics expected of a college that shows mainly strengths and very few weaknesses in dealing with students with disabilities?

MH In the past LEAs managed colleges, set out what was required and inspected accordingly. FEFC inspectors will be asking colleges what they are trying to do. The starting point

will always be a college's strategic plan and operational statement. Inspections will focus on how well a college is meeting its own objectives.

CB Centres of excellence?

MH In the past some LEAs identified specific colleges which they decided would make specialist provision for students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Provision in those colleges may be very good but students might not have the choice of attending their local college with their friends or they might not be able to take the course they wanted.

Students should have the opportunity to attend the college of their choice if they feel that the support or courses are better than at another college. However, the FEFC is not dictating what individual colleges should do. Priority areas for development are for each college to decide.

CB Colleges will be banding students with learning support needs based on their own assessments. What are the essential points of a good assessment system?

MH Many colleges have very experienced and often senior members of staff co-ordinating their learning support. They are the people who are the experts. Many good assessment systems already exist. Assessment may include information/reports from a link course before a student enters the college or discussions with school staff or parents as well as specialist assessments.

CB Circular 93/32 extended additional support to students needing help with literacy and numeracy where this is not their primary learning goal. Is this a slight broadening of the definition of students with disabilities or is the Council expecting a large number of claims for additional support units in this area?

MH Additional support means just that – additional support given to specific students who have been shown to need additional support in order to achieve their learning goals.

There isn't a large amount of extra money in the system for colleges to support students. Any substantial increase in additional support would therefore need to be matched by a decrease in the resources allocated to main learning programmes.

In the end it would be surprising to see large increases in the number of students for which a college is providing, or claiming to provide, additional support.

Maria Simon

Before I came to the college I used to stay at home and not do very much. I did not have the chance to meet anyone. Now my life has changed and I feel much better in myself. The work on the course is a real challenge but I have enjoyed it. Being at the college has also given me the chance to meet lots of different people.

The future

More than half of the FE colleges across the country identified students with disabilities as a targeted growth area in their strategic plans returned to the FEFC last year. This represents an unprecedented level of activity and development.

I am sure that many colleges who have indicated that they wish to extend their work with students with disabilities are concerned about physical access or specialist support. Few mainstream FE colleges have easy and unlimited access to speech therapists, occupational therapists, language specialists, teachers of the deaf or educational psychologists.

The costs of lifts, ramps and toilets are high. However, these items are usually only a fraction of the on-going human resource costs of making good quality provision for students with disabilities. If the FE sector is really going to expand this area of work we need to market beyond occasional students who have their own transport and can manage independently in college. A brief visit to disability groups or day centres should confirm that, in most areas of the country, we have only really scratched the surface in terms of meeting the needs of people with disabilities in local communities.

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"Why do we persist in creating systems that deny access to people with disabilities, then create another 'special' system to help people past the barrier that needn't have existed in the first place?"

To market effectively to students with disabilities colleges need to extend their links with social services, health authorities and other referral agencies. Marketing to students with disabilities generally means going out and talking to potential students about what they can and want to do.

Finally ...

Equality of opportunity for people with disabilities is a distant goal rather than a present reality. The FE system as a whole has a lot to do: the City and Guilds of London Institute told me that Stephen Hawking, scientist, writer, TV presenter and voice-over for British Telecom advertisements would be unable to pass the CGLI's basic communications assessment because he can't talk. Further investigation seems to have traced at least part of this problem back to the NCVQ (who else?). Of course, I wasn't actually enquiring on behalf of Stephen Hawking but on behalf of two deaf students who need to use British Sign Language in their exam. After 35 minutes on the phone having been referred to the NCVQ, City Lit, and 'The Special Needs Lobby' (who?) I could see the miles of red tape stretching before me.

The CGLI is actually one of the better examination boards when it comes to making special arrangements, so no doubt we will come up with a solution in the end. It should be easier than this though. Why do we persist in creating systems that deny access to people with disabilities, then create another 'special' system to help people past the barrier that needn't have existed in the first place?

Despite this, we live in interesting times. Further education is experiencing unprecedented change and, within many colleges, systems of learning support are developing and replacing or complementing traditional discrete provision for students with disabilities and learning difficulties. This must be a positive way forward, and one that we should build upon if we are to meet the needs of a substantial, and long neglected, sector of the FE community.

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The Staff College

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